Man’s Passions and Prejudices

Address

By YEHUDI MENUHIN

STUDENTS OF the university and colleagues: I wish to speak a few words to you on this, my tenth concert in Berlin since the end of war.

I came first to Germany to play to those who had survived the horrors of the camps, and later, as you must all know, I continued to come and play to all of you irrespective of creed or dogma, for I came as one who had much in common with you, one who shared with you the music of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, the thoughts of such renowned men as Goethe and Heine and the great wisdom of Brunner and Einstein.

This to me represented the greatness of your race and not the distorted miscreations of the Nazi decades. And it was because of this attitude of mine that I was able to come as a Jew who, fully cognizant of the indisputable crimes committed against his people in this very land, felt none the less that in these troubled and dangerous times it is essential to control the passions and prejudices of man and to judge him as an individual capable of good will and tolerance to his fellow man and not as a conglomerate mass, deaf and dumb to all the decencies which elevate him above the primitive tribes.

I have come as any trustworthy doctor would come to a patient because he was called. My concerts, as you know, were at the request of the American administration and were given without fee, the proceeds being given to such causes as I stipulated: the Jewish community, the Hochschule (Academy) for Music, in memory of Carl Flesch, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Freie Universität (Free University), and so forth.

I could do this, despite acrid criticism from certain quarters, not only because my country asked me to come but because it conformed with my own convictions as a human being and a musician. I felt I was representing in my triple capacity as an American, a musician and a Jew, something beyond the narrow, cruel conceptions that bade fair to warp the German race, and to convey to you all something of the essential brotherhood of man.

AMONG SEVERAL EXAMPLES showing that my attitude was understood and appreciated stands out this one from one Kurt Selter, a sensitive and touching letter from which I quote.

"To the greatest master of the present time:

" Allow me, revered master, to write you a few lines. I must do it because I owe you this.

"We, my wife and I, had the opportunity at the home of friends to hear you play over the radio. It was the first time. You played a composition by Paganini, I have forgotten its name, and we could not find out from the program. It fascinated us and the other listeners. I do not hesitate to tell you that I shed tears, tears over your playing.

"I am not an easily-impressed youngster any more, but a man of 30 years, who has become bitter and hard through the war and its consequences. I was wounded during the war, am out of a job, poor and the worry and strain of maintaining my family and my parents does not make things gayer for me.

"On my birthday today I was richly blessed, not with material things, but through your playing. It was worth more to me than the most wonderful material presents could have been. Through your playing I realized that there are incomparably beautiful things in the world, in this world of misery, and it is your playing that will give me strength to continue the struggle and to hope for eventual material security. This is the case with me as with many, many others who will hear you play. And, therefore, I and my family must thank you, the artist, who has been blessed by God.

AND FOR SOMETHING ELSE also I must thank you. I was a Hitler Youth leader, a little one only, but for many years. I was one out of idealism, out of conviction. I was raised in the spirit of a regime whose first tenet was the persecution of Jews. I should have condemned this tenet, but I supported it, and with me the greatest part of the young people who were in their teens in the early thirties.

"Surely we didn’t want any transgressions, at least I can say that for myself because I see in every human being the human side. That means an equal being created by God. But yet I must bear my part of the guilt for the misery which Germany brought upon your race—not in a material way, because as a 14-year-old I could prevent nothing—but spiritually because I approved the race laws and consequently the persecution of Jews.

"We young soldiers saw pretty soon that many things were not right in what we were taught. However, this prejudice against Jews, created generations ago and kept alive through generations, was hammered into us from childhood on. And then I heard you play, and it led me to meditate.

"I knew all of a sudden that the race laws, the prejudice against Jews, were lying nonsense—because a man who, with his playing, brought me and others a
heavenly present, happened to be a Jew and yet a
great artist blessed by God. And he was more, he was
a human being, a human being filled with the goodness
of his heart. This I read in your playing and for this
I thank you.

“One thing you should know. In one family here in
Germany two little girls will include you in their
prayers every evening. The wishes of children peer
through the clouds. I am not a pious man—just the
contrary. Perhaps I will become one some time in the
future, when the horrors of the last 10 years are far
behind me, the years which made us despair in God
and the human race. But I still believe in the power of
children’s prayers, and I don’t know anybody who
merits them more than you, for your playing and for the
human love which you spread among us through it.
This must be my thanks because I cannot give any-thing else.

“May God give you the happiness which you merit,
Yehudi Menuhin, artist through God’s gift and hard
work, and a human being with a heart full of love for
mankind.

(signed) “Kurt Selter.”

I FEEL THAT THIS letter speaks eloquently for itself
and it speaks for me because it reminds me that I
have come to you these last five years in the belief
that the only hope for mankind in this world is, “Do
unto others as you would they should do unto you.”

Yehudi Menuhin. (US Army photo)

I appeal to you, who have firsthand knowledge of the
sufferings engendered by hatred, to stand with me
against prejudice and bigotry wherever they might arise.
There is not one of us, no matter from what walk of
life, who does not have it in his power to combat these
forces of evil.

Now let us return to music.

US Study Open to 600 Germans

MORE THAN 600 GERMAN university students and
student teachers will be sent to the United States
during 1951 to study for one year at American universities
and colleges, the Exchanges Division, Office of Public
Affairs, has announced.

At the same time, 31 German educators, social workers
and youth leaders will be sent to study and work in their
respective fields in the United States for three to six
months. Exchange officials said that scores of projects in
many additional fields will be activated during 1951.

Following is breakdown of student projects:
A total of 400 undergraduate university students will
be selected for one year of study at US universities and
colleges. Two hundred young student teachers will study
for one semester at American teacher training institutions
and gain experience in teaching at practice schools during
the second term. Both groups will leave in the early fall
of 1951.

Another group of 48 young students will be selected to
leave during February for a year’s study of social sciences
and governmental affairs at several outstanding universi-
ties in these fields. Their studies will include several
observation trips to see American governmental agencies
in action.

In addition to the student projects, qualified German
experts will be selected to study American techniques
and procedures for periods of three to six months in the
following fields:
Ten persons to work with American social service and
maternal and child welfare agencies; six youth leaders to
study American youth self-help programs; 13 professors
and instructors to study American techniques of higher
education or teach in US universities; and two educators
to study methods of education research.

Except for the last one, all projects listed today are
open to residents of the French and British Zones as well
as the US Zone and West Berlin.

New Camp for Czech DP’s
A new DP camp for Czech refugees was opened last
summer at Iba, near Bebra, Hesse. The camp, formerly
used by German refugees, accommodates 250 Czech
refugees transferred from Bavaria to Hesse.